

Kathmandu -- The Ministry of Health and Population and National Centre for AIDS and STD Control disseminated the results of the 2009 Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance (IBBS) surveys conducted among high risk population groups. A very positive outcome of the surveys is the finding that, in comparison to previous years, there is a significant decline of HIV prevalence rates among injecting drug users (IDUs) and a stable low HIV prevalence among men who have sex with men (MSM), female sex workers (FSWs), and truckers. These trends in HIV prevalence rates indicate the success of the targeted national HIV response among high risk population subgroups that have resulted in better access to prevention services and significant improvements in safe injecting and sexual behaviors.

The results show the HIV prevalence among IDUs is 21% in Kathmandu, 4% in Pokhara valley and 8% in Eastern and Western Terai. The MSM population were divided into two groups: male sex workers (MSWs) and non- MSWs. The results showed higher HIV prevalence among MSWs (5.2%) as compared to non-MSWs (3.0%). HIV prevalence among FSWs is 2.3 % and no cases of HIV were found among truckers who are the most frequent clients of FSWs in Terai highway areas.

This survey was carried out among 1,245 IDUs, 600 FSWs, 400 truckers, and 400 MSM and conducted jointly by New ERA, ACNielsen, STD/AIDS Counseling and Training Services, and National Reference Laboratory with technical support from FHI Nepal through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funded ASHA Project.

“These studies are part of the National HIV Surveillance Plan under the NCASC and allow us to monitor trends in the epidemic and respond accordingly,” said Dr Laxmi Raj Pathak, Director of the NCASC.

Kevin A. Rushing, Director of USAID/Nepal remarked, “The survey results provide a clear indication that the national efforts to control HIV infection among the high-risk population subgroups of Nepal is working well. Our HIV programs working closely with the Government of Nepal have helped to limit the concentrated epidemic in most-at-risk populations, but more efforts are needed to identify those at risk and to reach them with testing and treatment.”

Jackie McPherson, Country Director for FHI/Nepal, stated, “HIV prevalence among IDUs were as high as 68% in Kathmandu, 22 % in Pokhara, 35% in Eastern Terai and 12 percent in

Western Terai in 2002/2003 and it is very pleasing to see the decline. We are very thankful to the national HIV program that such a provision of IBBS is made in the national Surveillance Plan and the findings of these important studies are used by all stakeholders and partners to better inform the HIV response in Nepal.”

The results were shared during a function at Hotel Shanker attended by various Governments agencies, INGOs, and NGOs working in the HIV/AIDS sector.